

# Bike Wise Month

## February 2009



ON YOUR BIKES! GET SET! RIDERS AT THE START OF THE FRANKLIN MAYORAL CHALLENGE RIDE. PHOTO BY BIKEWISE.

February 2009 was Bike Wise Month. In previous years the annual cycling celebration has been held for just one week, but this year the number and wide range of organised events made it impossible to coordinate them all during a single seven-day period.

It's hardly surprising that Bike Wise events attract more pedal pumping punters every year. Cyclist numbers are growing noticeably in New Zealand. About a third of our population (1.27 million people) own bicycles, and a fifth say they cycle regularly.

Retailers say bike sales are up, particularly of commuter bikes, as promotions like Bike Wise Month help everyday people see cycling as a way of becoming more active while reducing fuel and vehicle costs. It's also attractive to the increasing numbers who are worried about the size of their

carbon footprints.

The main funders behind Bike Wise Month are the NZ Transport Agency and the Ministry of Health. However, most of the activities are coordinated locally by all manner of individuals and groups including schools, councils, sporting bodies and many others. The events receive lots of support from local celebrities and businesses and often feature free giveaways, street performances and novelty competitions.

There's always a heavy emphasis put on fun to help convey the messages that biking is not only a viable means of transport, it's also an enjoyable one.

Activities can range from group rides to bike maintenance classes to riding lessons for 'Nervous Nellies and Nigels'. But there are three flagship

Bike Wise events: Go By Bike Day, the Bike Wise Battle and the Mayoral Challenge.

Wednesday 18 February was Go By Bike Day when New Zealanders were encouraged to leave their cars at home and ride a bike instead to work, school, the shops, or wherever they would normally drive.

In Lower Hutt, the Go By Bike Day breakfast was hosted by the Hutt City Council. Nearly 300 people turned up to enjoy free bagels, bananas, cereal and muesli bars. Organiser Anna Blomquist says they deliberately kept the event low-key so commuters could pop in and out quickly.

"The point of the breakfast was to highlight cycling as an easy and time-efficient way to get to work. But a lot of cyclists took the opportunity to stay and chat with kindred spirits."



many provided more than free food. In Dunedin, for example, cyclists were able to try some crazy cycle inventions by Bike 4 Fun. These included a triple-decker unicycle, penny farthings and impossible to ride 'bendy bikes'.

On Auckland's North Shore, breakfast attendees were treated to live music performances and a display by unicycle stuntman, Dan Wrightson. In Blenheim the free breakfast was prepared by a restaurant chef and included gourmet bacon, lettuce, tomato, and avocado-filled croissants.

For the Bike Wise Battle, companies, organisations and departments compete against others of a similar size in five categories. The aim of the Battle is to get as many colleagues as possible riding for two kilometres or 10 minutes during Bike Wise Month. Those with the highest percentage of staff participation win vouchers for scrumptious morning tea shouts. There are daily spot prizes and three Avanti bikes are also up for grabs.

This year 13,008 employees representing 663 workplaces and 2,687 departments hit the pedals to do their bit for the firm. Collectively they cycled over two million kilometres!

National titles went to Landcare Research (500+ staff), Fisher and Paykel (100-499 staff), Sinclair Knight Merz (25-99 staff), Child Development Services (7-24 staff) and Modern Office Ltd (3-6 staff).

But all the companies that took part are onto a winner. It makes good sense to encourage cycling at work because cyclists are generally productive employees. Studies link aerobic activities like cycling with boosts in creativity, increased energy and greater productivity. Fit workers take fewer sick days and have fewer workplace injuries. Being a cycle-friendly 'green' business can also be a powerful marketing tool.

Feedback from participating companies is that staff members enjoy the team-building the Battle engenders, and many decide to keep riding regularly when the Battle is over.

The Mayoral Challenge gives New Zealand towns and cities an opportunity to compete for the title of Most Cycle Mad City by getting as many people as possible to pedal along with their mayor on a fun bike ride. A point is earned for each participant, and bonus points are given for celebrities and community leaders. To keep things fair communities compete in either the small, medium or large population categories.

Around 50 towns and cities competed in this year's Mayoral Challenge, and about 17,300 people took part nationwide.

New Plymouth won the large size category this year with 3261 participants joining Mayor Peter Tenant on a ride around the coastal walkway. The Mayor said the event was fantastic and had a lovely atmosphere. It was well-supported by local businesses, too.

Franklin was the smallest region contending for the large category title. Seven hundred and three participants rode behind Mayor Mark Ball at Pukekohe Park Raceway on bikes, trikes, tandems and unicycles. A highlight of the event was the Driver's Drag Sprint, where a selection of Franklin's well-known motor sport drivers tackled an 800 metre cycle sprint, many wearing their driving suits and helmets.

Mayor Mark Ball said it was a great night, well-supported by the community and a real showcase of how fun and easy it is to cycle.

The mid and small-sized titles were won by Central Hawkes Bay and Opotiki respectively, both for the second year in a row. Opotiki's bragging rights were enhanced by the fact they mobilised 300 riders, despite torrential rain.

This is the fourth year that Bike Wise has been in full-swing. It was also the biggest by far. Each year events are attended by more cyclists and the promotion's mantra, "fitter, faster, cleaner, cheaper, fun" is being heard by more Kiwis.

By Bike Wise (Rob Zorn)

In Auckland, engineering firm Maunsell AECOM used the day as an opportunity to spread the message that sustainable transport can be fun – especially when you get creative! The company teamed up with Auckland's 'Heart of the City' business group, commandeering their fleet of bicycle tuk tuks, which are similar to rickshaws.

The tuk tuk convoy was escorted by around 30 Maunsell AECOM staff riding their own bikes to form a mass of fluorescent yellow-clad cyclists. The group spread the sustainable transport message all the way from their offices in Newmarket to the Viaduct for Auckland City's Go By Bike Breakfast where they won the prize for the biggest work team in attendance.

Other fun Go By Bike Day breakfasts were held in more than 50 centres across the country, and

